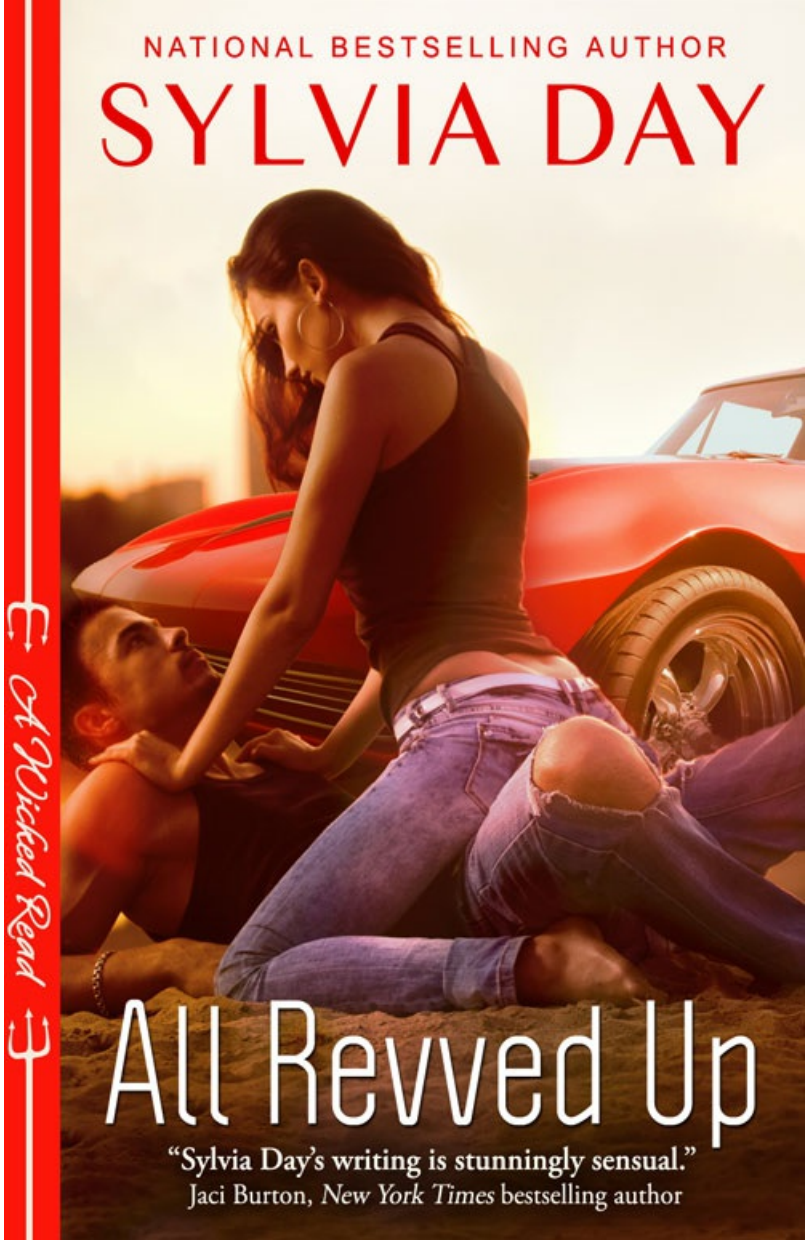
NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SYLVIA DAY
A Wicked Read
All Revved Up
"Sylvia Day's writing is stunningly sensual."
Jaci Burton, New York Times bestselling author

All Revved Up

by

Sylvia Day

Smashwords Edition

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CHAPTER 1

The smell of motor oil, degreaser, and coolant were among the very few scents in the world that made Miguel Santos's dick hard enough to drive nails. He blamed that on Faith Bennett. The girl he'd loved with the wild, intense passion only experienced in adolescence. The girl he had slaked all his raging teenage hormones on every chance he could. The girl he'd fully intended to marry and spend the rest of his life spoiling with the sort of expensive gifts, cars, and homes her struggling family couldn't afford.

…until she'd kicked him to the curb the day after his high school graduation.

Miguel pulled the keys from the ignition of the sleek BMW coupe he'd rented at the airport, then slid out from behind the wheel. He took off his sunglasses and stared at the auto shop in front of him. Bennett and Sons Garage looked better than he'd ever seen it. Fresh tan and forest green paint spoke of steady business, as did the number of cars in the service area. They'd expanded at some point, taking over the lot next door that used to be a paint shop. He'd noted on the drive over that the neighborhood had been revitalized. So much had changed in the eleven years since he'd left Rio Penasquitos. *He'd* changed.

But his memories of Faith remained the same—fierce and heated. Powerful.

Powerful enough to bring him face-to-face with a woman he'd sworn never to see again. He'd finally accepted that he wasn't moving forward because part of him was still clinging to the past. Like every other memory from high school, his recollections were stained by the perceived omnipotence of youth and he'd realized what he had to do. He needed to see Faith again, with an experienced man's eyes, so he could finally cut through the nostalgia and close that chapter of his past.

He headed to the waiting room. Grabbing the metal handle of the glass door, Miguel stepped into the cool air conditioning and smiled absently at those who filled the chairs in the expansive space. A mother was walking her son to the vending machine, an older gentleman was reading a copy of *Forbes* that just happened to have Miguel's dad on the cover, and a couple college-age kids were laughing over something they were watching on an iPhone.

"Good news, Mr. Sullivan," a husky voice called from behind the service counter. "You don't need a new radiator."

Miguel froze, his body tensing. He dreamed of that voice sometimes. Relived occasions when it had teased him, taunted him, begged him…

First loves were heady; everyone knew that. But his had been soaked with insanely combustible lust. A desire so hot it had seared into his brain.

He exhaled harshly and got a grip on himself. He'd been a kid then, highly-sexed and blessed with a lush, sensual girlfriend. It would be different now. He had control of his dick and libido.

Faith appeared at the counter, her gaze on her hands as she pulled off the latex gloves she wore while working. She was dressed in a baggy blue jumpsuit and her long, dark hair was clipped up, effectively subduing her sexiest assets.

Miguel's cock didn't mind. It thickened and lengthened with rousing appreciation.

Goddammit… She was still hot as hell. Full-lipped, blue-eyed, honey-skinned. A fucking walking wet dream.

Mr. Sullivan set down the issue of *Forbes* and stood.

"Your radiator hose—" Her gaze caught on Miguel. She paled and reached for the counter.

He stood riveted, rocked by desire so ferocious he could barely string two thoughts together. His brain got as far as him leaping over the counter and dragging her to the floor, then it shorted out.

"Radiator hose sprung a leak?" Mr. Sullivan asked, approaching her.

Faith visibly shook off her shock and glanced at her customer. "Yes. I replaced it and refilled your coolant reservoir. Angela will type up the repair order and check you out."

"Thank you."

She managed a tight smile before pivoting and walking back out of the half-door leading to the service bays.

The last time she'd turned her back to him had been the last time he saw her. She'd slid out of his bed in all her naked glory, her passion-flushed skin on display, her generous curves reigniting the lust she'd sated just a few moments before. Faith fought and fucked with no restraint, and he'd learned to just hang on and enjoy the ride.

"We've had a good time together," she'd said, looking over her shoulder with a cool smile. "I'm sure I'll miss you now and then after you're gone."

Two years together, and she dropped him like a forgettable one-night stand.

He had no idea how long she'd been planning on dumping him. From the beginning? She did it so blithely he knew he'd meant little to her for a while.

Galvanized by his remembered pain, humiliation, and simmering fury, Miguel stepped outside to wait. A moment later, she joined him from the nearest bay, her lips slicked with pinkish gloss. He wondered if she still favored the strawberry-flavored stuff. He used to love nibbling it off her mouth. And seeing the pink stain of it ringing his cock.

"Miguel." She blew out her breath in a rush. "I didn't know you were in town."

"Just pulled in." Literally. He hadn't stopped for gas or food, or said hi to his mother, who was expecting him to stay with her. He'd been planning on doing just that, until he saw Faith. Now, he would be getting a hotel room. Clearly just seeing her wasn't going to do the trick. He'd have to nail her to get the job done, to prove to his infatuated brain and unruly dick that she didn't have a golden, magical pussy. Sure it had felt that way at seventeen, when he'd had only a half-dozen girls in his sexual history and Faith had been the most precious thing in the world. He was thirty now and he'd had his share of women who knew how to wring a guy out in the sack. He just had to get past comparing new memories to faulty old ones. Similar to remembering an amusement park roller coaster as being wildly exhilarating, only to ride it again as an adult and realize it isn't all that when you're three times the size and a lot more jaded.

He'd soon be riding Faith again and gaining the same perspective. If she wasn't married or attached to a significant other…

His gut knotted. He couldn't tell by looking at her hand; she didn't wear rings for safety reasons.

"You came here first?" Her blue eyes gave nothing away. As hot as she was, she was also cool and controlled.

Except when she was beneath him. There had been nothing controlled or cool about her then.

"I thought I'd take you to dinner." He affected an easy smile. No simple task when he was furiously aroused, his entire body hard with need. "For old time's sake."

She looked him over, her gaze raking him from head to toe with a long, leisurely pause on his raging hard-on. He crossed his arms and widened his stance, his jaw clenching as the button-fly of his jeans dug into his straining cock. It fucking killed him that she could still affect him this way. He'd had a lot of beautiful women, but only Faith made him feel like he might *die* if he didn't get inside her.

"Take me to dinner?" she repeated. "Or take me to bed?"

"Both." He refused to feel vulnerable for stating his intentions. Just because he was hot to fuck her didn't mean she had the power to hurt him. Hiding anything would suggest wariness and he wasn't going to give her that ammunition. She could shred him just fine without any help. "Or just the latter."

Her chin lifted. "Do you have a significant other in your life?"

"I wouldn't be propositioning you if I was."

"No girlfriend?"

He shook his head.

"Fiancé?"

"Not yet."

Miguel looked for any sign that his responses pleased or displeased her. She revealed nothing. His dick throbbed in time with the pounding beat of his heart. "You?"

She waved the question off with marked impatience. "Where should I meet you?"

Her desire to have an escape vehicle aggravated him, which he didn't hide with his curtness. "Mezaluna work for you? I'll pick you up."

"It's gone. The Torettos moved a few years ago. They wanted a quiet little restaurant, so when things got busy around here, they moved on."

Rio Penasquitos hadn't even been a spot on the map when he'd left, but it had grown into a quaint tourist destination and vacation spot for the wealthy. That was due in part to his mother, a trophy wife who'd returned to her home town to raise her only child and brought media attention with her. "Why don't *you* pick *me* up at the bed and breakfast," he challenged, "and we'll figure it out from there."

Her foot lifted, her leg moving restlessly. His gaze narrowed on that telltale movement.

"Okay," she said finally. "What time?"

"Seven?" He remembered the shop closed at five. Expectation thrummed through him, a heated awareness that made a joke of the casual interaction they were pretending this was. Tension was strung tight between them, vibrating in the air with the energy of an approaching thunderstorm.

She wasn't indifferent to him. He wondered if he'd possibly ruined her, too. Just a little. While he couldn't imagine any man not taking the time to savor her body for hours, he knew damn well that no one could possibly love her as completely as he once had. Even the man he was today was incapable of that depth of emotion and connection. She'd killed the innocence in him that had made it possible to love a woman without any thought of self-preservation. He'd been wide open when she cut his heart out and scars had formed, creating a thick shield that he couldn't get past and no woman could get through.

"I'll see you then." She backed up toward the garage. "You look good, Miguel."

"So do you." Good? She looked edible. His mouth was damn near watering with the anticipation of tasting her again. If there hadn't been a dozen auto technicians around, he would have kissed off waiting until seven and taken what he wanted now. As it was, there was no conveniently private place on the lot to eat her sweet pussy, which is exactly what he'd do once he got his lips on her.

"I'm glad you came by," she said softly, holding his gaze.

He bared his teeth in a smile. He didn't want to be placated. He wanted a rushed dinner followed by unrushed sex that would pale in comparison to his exaggerated recollections. Then he'd leave the past behind where it belonged. "So... did you end up missing me now and then?"

"Sure." She turned her back to him again. "See you at seven."

* * *

Faith barely made it to the dispatcher's office before her composure broke. Leaning against her father's desk, she gasped for breath, her eyes stinging with unshed tears.

Miguel Santos. Even after all these years, his effect on her was like getting hit by a bus.

"Hey."

She looked at her eldest brother filling the doorway. "Hey."

"John said Miguel was here."

"Yeah." It wasn't fair that his dark sexuality was even more potent now than it had been in high school. He was businessman for God's sake. A "corporate raider," although he called what he did "activist shareholding." He should have a paunch. And thinning hair. Instead he was a delectably mature version of the quarterback he'd been in high school. His dark T-shirt hadn't hidden his beautifully defined biceps or his lean waist. She bet he still had washboard abs and a heavily muscled back. And the rest of him…

Jesus. One look at him and she swore she could feel him pushing inside her. She remembered that all too well. The searing pleasure of his entry. The sensation of utter surrender.

Russell stepped into the office, his blue eyes dark with concern. "What did he want?"

Blowing out a shaky breath, she moved to one of the two chairs facing the desk and sat. "Retribution. He tried to play it off, but he was seething. I could feel it from several feet away."

"Then he's not over you." He scrubbed a hand over his shadowed jaw, his gaze thoughtful. "And we all know you never got over him. Maybe this is a second chance."

"At what? Hurting each other?" She swiped at her wet eyes. Everything was knotted up inside her, making her lightheaded and queasy. "His life is in New York. Mine is here in California."

"Things are different now." Leaning his hip into the desk, Russell crossed his arms and looked back out the door into the busy service bays. Air tools whirred loudly, drowning out the sound of multiple radios, each playing a different genre to suit the tastes of the auto tech who owned it. "Business is hopping. We've got a solid nest egg—"

"*I'm* not different," she argued. "I don't want to raise a family away from my own family. I don't want to sit in a penthouse apartment, planning dinner parties and waiting for my husband to come home late only to leave early the next morning. I'm not the right girl for that life and Miguel can't settle for anything less. This isn't *Pretty Woman*, Russ. The girl from the wrong side of the tracks doesn't always end up with the millionaire."

"You did not just compare yourself to a prostitute."

"Cinderella, then. That better?"

"Hardly. In any case, Miguel wouldn't be settling with you," Russell bit out, bristling with an older brother's pride. A consummate ladies' man himself, he didn't tolerate the same nonchalance in men she dated.

"He wouldn't be getting *this* either." She waved a hand that encompassed her greasy uniform from neck to ankle. "One of the things I've always loved about him was his acceptance of me just the way I am. It turns him on that I wrench and get dirty. If I slipped on a pair of heels and a strand of pearls he'd probably need Viagra to fuck me."

She actually couldn't imagine Miguel ever needing Viagra for any reason, but—

"Whoa." Russ held up a hand. "TMI."

That made her smile briefly. "I have to call Mrs. Santos. Let her know he's on the way."

"How long is he in town?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going to see him again?"

A hot shiver coursed through her. The sexual ferocity on Miguel's face had made her wet. It had always been that way between them, their desire simmering below the surface, ready to boil over at the slightest provocation. "Yes. Dinner. Tonight."

"I'm not sure I feel good about that. If he's pissed off, I don't want you anywhere near him."

Faith's brows rose. "I'm a grown woman. That's not your call."

"You've been hurt enough as it is."

"He's got a right to be mad, don't you think?"

Russ stilled. "He knows?"

"No." She rubbed at the knot of fear and regret in her stomach. "But that doesn't change anything. It's his birthday tomorrow. If he wants to ring in the occasion by working out his frustration in the sack, well... I really don't mind. It's been a long assed dry spell for me and—"

Covering his ears, her brother was up and out the door in a heartbeat.

She was reaching for the phone when he poked his head back in. "What?" she asked.

"I'll run point tonight."

Her love for him swelled and constricted her chest. "You sure?"

"Absolutely. Mom said I'm losing my 'favorite uncle' status to Johnny. Can't have that. I have a rep to maintain."

Pressing her fingers to her lips, she blew him a kiss. "You can drop him off at Mrs. Santo's house in the morning before you come in to work. And have I told you lately that you're the best?"

"I've got a nasty right hook, too. You tell Miguel that if he gets out of hand."

* * * * *

CHAPTER 2

Faith stepped out of her classic red Corvette and sucked in a deep, fortifying breath. With one forearm on the frame of the driver's side window and the other on the roof, she stared at the small bungalow behind Victorian Secrets Bed and Breakfast. Its original purpose, back when the property had been built two hundred years ago, was as the housekeeper's residence. The main house was once the governor's mansion. Seated on two acres in the middle of an otherwise modern residential area, the two story bed and breakfast had a wide wraparound porch and huge yard.

God, the place had memories. She was certain Miguel had chosen it for that very reason. To unsettle her, maybe. Which was also the likely reason for why he didn't appear when she honked the horn. He was going to make her go inside, make her face the ghosts of their past.

Faith shoved the car door closed and headed for the bungalow's entrance. Her stilettos clicked across the driveway, beating out a staccato rhythm that couldn't keep up with her racing heart. With effort, she resisted the urge to smooth the skirt of her dress. It was classic black, in a soft jersey and wraparound style. The crisscrossing halves created a plunging neckline that revealed the upper swells of her breasts and a hint of blue lace demi-bra, the hue of which matched her eyes. The whole ensemble was new, from her earrings to her heels.

She thought of it as armor. Her only defense against Miguel was his desire for her.

Reaching the door, she knocked on the inset glass. He called for her to come in, so she entered, but nothing could have prepared her for what she found inside.

"Sorry," he said, sounding completely unapologetic as he scrubbed at shower-damp hair with a towel. "I had a business call that took longer than expected."

He was naked.

She closed the door by stumbling back and leaning heavily against it, her knees weakened by a lust so ferocious it made her dizzy. Brazenly unabashed, Miguel stood in the living room completely nude, his gorgeous caramel-hued skin on display, his beautiful abs and biceps flexing as he dried himself. His body was the stuff of orgasmic dreams, hard and rippling with muscle. Wide shoulders tapering down to a lean waist and hips. Maturity graced him, turning his formerly sinewy and lanky body into a powerhouse of potent masculinity. He personified the fantasy of a sensual Latin lover, dripping sex and confidence, free of any inhibitions.

Her gaze fell to his cock and stayed there helplessly, her mouth watering at his virility. He was half-erect and impressive. When he was fully aroused, as he was quickly becoming under the avidity of her gaze, he was a sexual god. A small sound escaped her, a needy cry as her pussy grew slick and soft with wanting. He had been her first lover, her virginity given to him in the bedroom that waited just a few feet behind him, a room in which he'd ruined her for other men.

Sharp possessiveness sunk its claws into her, curling her hands into fists. The need to claim him, and that decadently sinful body he'd once pledged to her, was so voracious she burned with it. *Mine*, she thought savagely. *He's mine*.

The towel fell to the floor.

Faith panted through parted lips as he came toward her in a riveting display of golden skin and sinuous muscle. His eyes, so dark they were nearly black, smoldered with carnal intent. The curve of his exquisite mouth was etched with cruelty. He was so hot with lust and anger she was surprised the dampness on his skin didn't steam away.

A shiver of fear sharpened the knife's edge of her hunger. She was aching with emptiness, tense with expectation, heartbroken that they should be at this place—wanting each other so deeply they were sick with it.

"Miguel," she breathed as his hands caught her by the hips.

"I can't go anywhere like this," he bit out, sounding furious. His face was pressed into her hair, his breathing harsh against her ear. One hand cupped the back of her thigh, kneading with almost painful squeezes as he moved up and under the hem of her dress. He palmed her bare cheek before sliding around to the front, growling when he found the wet satin covering her pussy.

Faith gasped at the electric contact, her hips thrusting forward without volition.

Catching her around the waist with his arm, he hitched her up hard against him. His questing fingers found the edge of her thong's elastic band and eased beneath it, sliding through the silky moisture that slickened her folds to rub her clit.

She jolted against him, her body strung so tight she thought she might snap.

"You're hot and creamy, Faith," he taunted softly, circling the clenching opening of her vagina. "And I'm hard and aching for you. Were you thinking of me when you stepped into this thong and pulled it on? Were you thinking of what it would do to me? How crazed it would make me? Did the thought of me desperate to fuck you turn you on?"

"Of course. It's been a long time. Wouldn't want there to be any awkwardness." Her voice came out with the husky assurance of a practiced seductress, but inside she was a young woman again, madly in love and overwhelmed by a hunger that could only be appeased by a man who resented her.

He tensed against her, his arm at her waist nearly crushing her. "And I wouldn't want to disappoint. How do you want it?"

She was about to reply when two long fingers pushed into her. She bit her lip to hold off an orgasm, fighting not to embarrass herself by showing just how long it had been since a man had touched her sexually.

"So tight, *mi hermosa*." He began to thrust. Easy and slow. Piercing her defenses with consummate skill. "Should I drill you with my fingers 'til you come, then have you return the favor with your mouth? Save the fucking for after dinner?"

"If we don't sweeten your temper, *mi tesoro*," she purred back, struggling to hide her roiling emotions, "I don't think I'll be going anywhere with you."

"We'll order in, then." His dark gaze was hard. "You'll need the energy."

Faith gripped his muscular ass and climaxed against her will, pleasure rushing through her with a violence that stole her strength. If not for his grip, she would have sunk to the floor in a quivering mess.

"Such a greedy little cunt," he muttered hoarsely. "I've never forgotten how it feels around my cock."

Her body was flushed and misted with perspiration, her pussy still trembling around his embedded fingers. She wondered if she'd survive the night. Miguel knew how to bare her soul in a way no one else could. She let him in so deeply, it sometimes felt as if she couldn't breathe without his touch, but he was so closed off with hurt and anger she knew she'd never reach him. Not like this.

"Kiss me," she ordered, her fingers digging into the rock-hard flesh of his perfect ass.

He turned his head so swiftly, he startled her. But when he sealed his mouth over hers, there was no urgency. His tongue licked across the seam of her parted lips, then dipped inside, teasing. His teeth nibbled at the strawberry gloss she knew he loved, his low moan vibrating against her breasts. He ate at her mouth as if he had all the time in the world, as if she was the sweetest delicacy and he couldn't get enough. Her toes curled.

"Hold on," he whispered against her lips, confusing her. Then he ripped her panties off her body, rocking her on her stilettos.

The sharp bite of pain as the elastic dug into her hips before breaking only fueled her fierce determination to reach the tender, loving man she once knew. She lifted one leg and anchored it on his hip, but even with three-inch heels, she was too short to take his cock.

Miguel gripped the backs of her thighs and hefted her up. Her arms encircled his shoulders, their gazes meeting. His features were stark, his mouth a hard line. His penis throbbed against her, the thick length pressed between the parted folds of her sex. She pushed her fingers into his dark hair, the thick locks feeling like damp silk

against her skin. The words she wanted to say burned her throat and tongue, explanations and declarations that would only cause more pain because the end would only be the same. Instead she said the only part of the truth that might help to heal... "I'm sorry, *mi tesoro*."

His eyes glistened for a moment and his throat worked on a hard swallow. "So am I."

Setting his jaw, he turned from the entrance, carrying her past the couch and through the open louvered double-doors to the bedroom. Faith didn't look away as they approached the bed, expecting the room had changed as much as they both had and wanting to remember it as it had been.

One of his hands slid up her spine to cradle the back of her head. He lowered her to the mattress as if she was cherished and breakable. Her back settled onto the cool comforter and she released him with reluctance, wishing only to hold him close, to soothe him, to say with her touch and body what she knew better than to say with words. He arranged her for his pleasure, with her hips at the edge of the bed. He stood between her spread legs, a sexual fantasy come to life, exuding dominance and forceful masculinity from every pore.

He tossed her skirt out of the way and took his cock in hand. Fisting it once. Twice. Color flagging his cheekbones, a wince betraying how hard he was. She opened wider for him, her thighs falling open, followed shortly by the untying of her dress and the parting of the halves. Arching her back, Faith raised her lace covered breasts to him, remembering how he'd worshipped them in their youth. They were not what they'd been then; her body hadn't weathered the years as well as his. But it didn't seem to matter now. A decade slipped away as if it had never come between them at all. Here she was, only hours after his return, offering herself to him with no restraint. Desperate to regain the closeness they'd shared.

"*Me vuelves loca*," he groaned, angling his penis to stroke the thick crown through the lips of her pussy, up and down, nudging her swollen clit with every pass.

Faith writhed with need, her chest tight with a yearning she was certain would destroy her when he left again. "You're driving *me* crazy. Don't tease me, Miguel."

There was no time for teasing. The hours between now and his departure were too precious to waste. Her stomach knotted at the thought, the urgency of time running away from her filled her with aching fear. How had she lived without this... without *him* for so long?

He watched her face as he rubbed his satiny cockhead against her. "But you're so beautiful like this. I've dreamt of you just this way."

"Stop dreaming," she said between clenched teeth. "Start fucking."

There was the slightest tease of a smile, which damn near stopped her heart, then he notched the tip of his magnificent cock in the entrance to her body. "Say it again. Tell me to fuck you."

Deliberately inciting him, she squeezed her breast is one hand and reached between her legs with the other. She scissored her fingers and gripped his shaft between her knuckles, licking her lips in blatant provocation. "*Hazme el amor*."

Make love to me.

He caught his lower lip between even white teeth, his features so austerely sexual she creamed in expectation, bathing him in a fresh rush of moisture. He slid in a fraction deeper and electricity raced across her skin. It had been so long... She'd missed him so much...

He filled her with a practiced roll of his hips, stretching her delectably. The familiar feeling of utter surrender swept over her, arching her neck and closing her eyes. "*Miguel*."

"Christ," he hissed, shuddering as he touched the end of her, the lips of her sex hugging the wide root of his cock. "You're burning up and so fucking tight. Squeezing me like a fist."

Her hand moved to his bare hip, her heavy eyelids lifting so she could watch him move. Sex was an art for Miguel. Even as a teenager, hot with hormones and inexhaustible energy, he'd had finesse. Orgasm was a bonus for him; the buildup to getting there was what he really savored. His haste to get inside her, his crudity, told her how hurt he was and how closely he nursed that pain. How determined he was to depersonalize an act that was profoundly intimate for them. She couldn't blame him for that, not when she was responsible. She'd made a clean break between them with the best of intentions, but regardless, she'd broken both their hearts and while he'd left her with something precious, she'd sent him off with only feelings of betrayal.

With his gaze riveted to the place where their bodies joined, Miguel pulled his heavy cock from her in a slow, wet glide. He splayed his hands on her inner thighs, his skin so dark against hers, his grip gentle but unyielding. He held her open as he surged forward, pushing pleasure through her aching body. In a deliciously erotic display of rippling abdominal muscles and powerfully veined biceps, he fucked her with perfect rhythm. He worked her pussy into a blissful relaxed state so that she took him more easily, so that each push and withdrawal became more fluid.

Faith moaned, insensate with lust and longing. Her nails, short as they were, left crescents in his skin. "You're so big... God, it's so good..."

"Oh yeah," he purred, watching her with slumberous eyes. "So damn good."

He pumped deep and rotated his hips against her, stirring her into a frenzy with his rock-hard length. Her pussy rippled with delight and he growled, grabbing her hips and lifting them into his thrusts.

His measured tempo increased, his hips churning and swiveling, his rigid penis shafting her tender pussy with relentless drives. She caught the comforter in her fists, arching into his delicious pounding. Sobbing with pleasure, she spasmed around him, so close to coming again she could taste it.

"Ah, Faith," he grated, holding still at the deepest point and grinding her onto him, working her hips in tight circles against his pelvis. He was shoved so deep, he was touching her cervix. His chest and abdomen sheened with sweat. "You're making me come."

Miguel cursed with the first wrenching spurt. Clenching his jaw, he threw his head back and climaxed violently. His fingers dug with bruising force into her hips, cramming her tight against him. She felt every jerk of his cock, every scorching pulse of semen. The ferocity of his pleasure and the primal way he ensured she took every drop pushed her over the edge with him.

A mist of sweat bloomed on her skin, the orgasm searing across her nerve endings and blackening her vision. Held rigid in the grip of mind-blowing pleasure, Faith cried out his name in a hoarse broken voice, her pussy milking him in tiny convulsions until he fell across her in a gasping blanket of hot beloved male.

* * *

Rubbing his sweat-slick forehead against the comforter, Miguel thrust his fingers into Faith's long hair and groaned as her plush, wet pussy clenched in aftershocks around his spurting cock. The ecstasy sizzling down his spine kept him coming, his balls aching as he emptied them deep inside her.

"Oh god," she breathed against his ear. "I can't bear it."

His teeth ground together until his jaw cramped. Without volition, his hips rocked into her, his body mindlessly seeking a way to crawl inside her. To possess her. The sex wasn't at all the way he remembered it. He used to be able to get out of bed afterward and walk to the bathroom to dispose of the condom...

Ay Dios mio... Nuzzling his temple against hers, Miguel waited for the panic to strike and felt only a vicious primitive satisfaction. His cock was bathed in his cum and Faith's. For the first time in his life he was balls-deep and bareback in a woman, and it was the one woman in the world he could ever imagine having children with. The girl who'd stolen his heart and never given it back. She took family seriously. If he knocked her up, she'd find a way to make it work between them. He could have her and the life he wanted. Ruthless, yes, but then he always was when he wanted something.

Whether she loved him or not... Well, love was a complication they'd be better off without. He could live with just this—her hot and luscious body in his bed,

taking everything he could give her with unrestrained abandon. It was too easy to picture her in his penthouse in Manhattan, spread out on his gray silk sheets, sobbing his name as he fucked her with the nightscape of the city displayed thru the floor-to-ceiling windows behind the bed.

"Umm... Miguel." Her hands slid over his damp back, her lips pressed against the sensitive spot just in front of his ear. "I did miss you."

He caught one of her hands, then the other, dragging them over her head. With his knee, he nudged her leg over, widening the cradle of her thighs. He lifted his head and looked down at her, his aspirations for the result of this visit altering by the moment. His tongue traced the curve of his lower lip, his gaze sweeping over her face, taking in the dazed pleasure in her eyes and the cat-like smile of contentment. He rolled his hips just to feel how soaked she was.

She inhaled sharply. "You're still hard."

"Are you surprised, *mi querida*? I've missed you, too."

He felt the sole of her shoe rub up and down his calf. A gruff sound of pleasure escaped him.

Looking up at him with the blue eyes that haunted him, she gave him a taunting smile and wriggled suggestively. "Take me, then, *mi tesoro*. I'm yours."

No, you're not, he thought as he withdrew slowly, only to thrust home hard and fast. *Not yet. But you will be.*

* * * * *

CHAPTER 3

Watching Faith shift gears in her classic Corvette was so arousing, Miguel's dick stirred with appreciation even though he was presently wrung dry. That was why they'd left the bungalow, why they were driving to a sports bar with a late-night kitchen.

She made him feel like a teenager again, hopeful and vigorous. He'd had her in bed twice, then again in the shower. When she sat on the couch in a plush terrycloth robe with her hair hanging in wet tangles around her shoulders, he'd wanted her again. The domesticity that he avoided with other women had been an aphrodisiac with Faith. He'd sat on the couch beside her and pulled her over him, his head falling back into the cushions as she slid her slick, hot cunt onto him. They'd gone easy on each other the last time, neither of them in a rush. He could tell she was getting sore and guessed she'd been without a steady partner in a while.

Yet she'd come willingly to him when he asked.

The pleasure he could give her was a vulnerability he was prepared to exploit. He would do or say whatever was necessary to get her to come home with him. The world was at his fingertips. He could meet whatever demands she might make of him.

"You're thinking hard," she said, pulling deftly into the parking lot and claiming at space. "But at least you're not scowling anymore."

"I'm too relaxed to scowl."

"Well, then, the food and a beer might put you to sleep."

He climbed out of the passenger seat and looked over the roof to where she stood on the driver's side. "Don't count on it."

"Promises, promises," she teased.

He met her around the front, raking her with a head-to-toe glance. She'd lost her makeup and hairstyle in the shower, but he didn't see her as any less stunning now. The dress was amazing for its simplicity, allowing the woman inside it to take center stage—a woman who was presently commando in public, which drove him insane every time he thought about it.

For the last dozen years he'd hungered for this, spending time with her, being teased by her, feeling wanted for something other than his money and power. His mother had warned him that Faith was a gold digger, and while it took one to know one, he'd never believed it. In fact, he'd come to wonder if his father's money had actually been a sticking point between him and Faith. While she'd never said so aloud, Faith had grown noticeably uncomfortable whenever he talked about the things he wanted to buy her and the places he wanted to take her.

As they entered the sports bar with his hand at her lower back, he felt the same pride at being seen with her that he'd felt as a kid. She was beautiful, with a body built for sin, but she was also down to earth and self-effacing. She had a wicked sense of humor and a keen sense of fair play. He found it sexy as hell that she could diagnose and repair any car trouble, had minor plumbing skills, and could put together any home electronics system, regardless of how many cords and connections were required. His best friend in high school had said she would be the perfect girl if only she liked sports. Miguel knew she was perfect even without that interest.

They slid into a booth, and ordered some beer and hot wings to start. After the waiter moved away, Miguel leaned back and opened conversation. "It looked like business is doing well at the shop."

"It is. Although the town has grown, it still has that small town mentality. Even after they built the auto mall and the dealerships moved in, most of the residents trust us more. And they send a lot of referrals our way."

"I'm not surprised. You're the best mechanic there is."

Her eyes sparkled in that way that made him feel like a king. He wanted to give her everything, spoil her to excess, just so he could see her look at him like that every day.

"Thank you."

"Are Russell and Jason still there?"

"Of course. They love it, too. It's in our blood." She thanked the barback who brought their drinks and the young man's appreciation of her beauty was evident in his returning grin. His expression sobered, however, when he looked at Miguel.

Faith laughed. Even over the blaring music he heard it and the sound tightened his chest. "I see you're still possessive."

"Only with you."

Her smile faded slowly. "Don't waste the energy on me."

One brow arched. "Why not?"

"Because when I'm with you, you're the only man I see." Her words were accompanied by a Mona Lisa smile that left him wondering if there was any truth at all to her words, or if she was teasing him.

"Then maybe I should stick around."

She took a long pull on her beer, choosing to drink from the bottle rather than use the frosted glass next to it. He found that erotic. Of course, everything about her was erotic to his mind.

"You'd go stir crazy around here," she said.

"Probably," he agreed, knowing he was addicted to the adrenaline rush inherent in his line of work. The closest he came to relaxing while conscious was when he was with Faith. "Are either of your brothers married?"

"Jason came close once, but the gal joined the Coast Guard and he wasn't willing to leave Rio Penasquitos. Russell has never come close. I'm beginning to doubt he ever will. He's got commitment avoidance syndrome."

Miguel picked at the label on his bottle. "He just hasn't found the right woman yet."

"That's what my mother says."

"I've been told I have commitment issues." He held her gaze. "But I was prepared to marry you. Was desperate to, actually. So everyone would know you belonged to me."

She paled.

He pushed forward. As always, he was playing to win. "You didn't ask me why I'm here. Aren't you curious?"

The hot wings arrived at the table. The large round plate was set between them, but neither of them moved to eat.

"Yes," Faith said, so quietly that he read her answer on her lips rather than heard it. "I'm curious."

"I recently broke up with someone I'd been seeing for several months. She was pressing for... more. And I couldn't give it to her. Our last night together wasn't pretty. She was upset and said some things that weren't pleasant. But the only thing that stuck with me was her assertion that she was perfect for me. That we were compatible in every way and I was just too fucked up to see it."

"Ouch." But her eyes were hard, her mouth pursed with jealousy. She may tease him about his possessiveness, but she was equally so. Always had been. It had taken her months to believe he was really interested in her and several more months beyond that to convince her that while he wanted into her pants in the worst way, that wasn't why he was dating her. Once she'd come to believe that the rich boy with the good looks, Aston Martin, and deftness with a football was really interested in

a poor girl who worked a dirty job and was never part of the "in" crowd, she'd become a tigress. He was her man and anyone who forgot that was swiftly reminded.

He couldn't wait to see her at a company party, her lithe legs in heels and a champagne flute in her hand. She'd have her arm around his and a look in her eyes that said, *Yes, he's my arm candy. Only I get to taste.*

"She was right," he said with a dismissive shrug. "There wasn't anything wrong with her—aside from the fact she wasn't you."

Faith's eyes were so dilated; the blue of her irises was a mere sliver around the black center. "Miguel, I..." Her voice trailed off, as if she didn't know what to say.

"I came back to prove to myself that being with you couldn't possibly be the way I remembered." Lifting his beer bottle, he dipped the neck toward her in a toast. "And I was right. It's better."

He cursed his inability to read her thoughts. She looked shaken, but not overly pleased about his confession. He reminded himself that she'd dumped him—callously. Maybe being with him long term was something she still didn't want. Maybe he was just a hot fuck.

"It was always good between us," she said finally, pulling herself together and arranging wings on a plate before handing it to him.

"So what happened?" he asked, detesting the gruffness of his voice that gave too much away. It was time to be honest, but ripping himself open wasn't how he wanted to manage this.

Wiping her hands with a napkin, she looked at him, her features soft and her eyes impossibly sad. "You were going to Princeton; I wasn't. I knew a clean break was the only way you would go without me holding you back."

Miguel froze from the inside out. His hand tightened with white-knuckled force on the bottle. With his gut churning with anger and confusion, he seized the one thing out of the mess of his emotions that mattered to him. "Did you love me?"

Her hands stilled. She looked at him with luminous eyes. "More than anything."

"Bullshit." He rubbed at his chest, trying to ease the ache that made it hard to breathe. "If that was true, you would've come with me. The fact is, you loved your family more. And this town, the shop—"

"I would have held you back even if I'd g-gone with you!" she cried, her voice breaking. "Your parents thought I was after your money. Hanging on to you would only have proven them right."

"As if I gave a shit what they thought. They would have come around eventually, and it wouldn't have mattered to me if they didn't."

"It mattered to *me*. You had years of college ahead of you—fraternities, sports, late night-studying... There was no place for me in that."

He pushed the beer away, feeling sick. "I would have made a place for you. Or we could have agreed to a long-distance relationship. Phone calls, visits, holiday breaks."

"All of which would have interrupted time with your father and curbed your freedom to network. You needed to create the contacts you could use in the future."

"I hate to break it to you, *mi querida*," he said coldly, "but I was fucking miserable all through college. I might have continued being miserable afterward, if I hadn't become numb to everything."

Faith inhaled sharply. A tear slid down her cheek, pissing him off. She had no right to cry over his pain, not when she'd caused it.

He turned, pushing out of the booth, unable to sit there and bleed over her tears, which he couldn't bear.

"Miguel." She stayed him with a hand on his arm. "Wait. We'll go together."

Catching her by the wrist, he yanked her toward him. "You once told me you'd love me forever. Was that a lie, too?"

"How can you ask me that, after tonight?" she whispered, tears streaming.

"Then, yes, we'll go together." He released her and stood. He dug into his pocket for his money clip and tossed cash on the table. "Back to New York. Where you should have been the last eleven years."

She wiped at her wet cheeks with both hands. "I can't."

He shot her a scathing look. "What's the excuse now? I've climbed the ladders I needed to. Now I've got everything I want, except for you."

"It's not you—"

"It's me? You're not seriously going to shovel that."

"It's— I..." She took another deep breath. "I have a son."

The ground dropped out from beneath his feet. He swore the room tilted. The overly loud music pounded through his skull. He stumbled away from the booth, nearly toppling a waitress balancing a full-tray of food. Apologizing over his shoulder, he made his way outside, desperate for air in his burning lungs.

* * *

They spoke not a word on the ride back. The only concession Miguel made was to carry the to-go bag she'd taken the time to order before they left the restaurant and to hold the door open for her when they got back to the bungalow.

He went into the bedroom, his body taut with a tension that told her to give him some time alone. She went to the kitchen and began unpacking the food, her hands shaking from the raw pain she'd seen on his face. She had been half-afraid she wouldn't find him waiting by the car when she exited the sports pub, but she'd known she would follow him if he called a cab.

This day of reckoning was long overdue.

Faith made two plates of steak and shrimp fajitas with all the fixin's, then set them on the small round dining table. She began to eat, ravenous in a way only a stress-eater could be.

She was nearly done by the time Miguel reappeared. He entered the living area dressed in striped silk pajama bottoms and nothing else. There was a new bottle of cognac on the table behind the couch and he went to it, opening it and pouring himself a glass. He glanced at her in silent inquiry, but she shook her head.

Now that he was in front of her—the beautiful boy she'd loved now a formidably gorgeous man—she was struck by how much she stood to lose. There was nothing to be done about it, not with as disparate as their lives were. They'd eventually make each other miserable. Resentment would grow in whichever one of them was forced to give up their lifestyle and livelihood for the other.

He lifted the tulip-shaped glass of amber liquid to his lips and drank, his eyes closing with a weariness that broke her heart.

"I didn't know you still cared," she said softly, pushing her plate away. "I thought you'd get to New York, meet some gorgeous supermodel, and realize you'd dodged a bullet with me."

"Shut up," he snapped. "I don't need to be insulted on top of everything else."

"I wasn't—" The look on his face made her recoil back into the chair.

"You martyred yourself for our love, but I'm so shallow any hot piece of ass would do?"

"That's not what I meant." She inhaled deeply, taking the hit because she deserved it. "I did it as much for me as for you. I did it for both of us, and no matter how pissed off you are—and I'm not saying you don't have the right to be—I still believe I made the right decision."

Miguel tossed back his drink and poured another one.

"You should eat something," she said.

His quelling glance didn't scare her. And in the end, he set the refilled glass down and walked away from it. "How old is your son?"

Faith's stomach flipped. She didn't want to lie to him. As it was, it was killing her to keep Michael away from his father, but she knew what would happen if Miguel knew. He would take over, force her to go with him to keep her son. But the life she was giving Michael now was the best for him. Later, when he was older, she expected to lose her son to his father just as she'd lost Miguel. He would want to emulate his father and grandfather, follow in their footsteps. He would go to Princeton on the trust Mrs. Santos had created for him and he would eventually live in New York and join his father's world, she was certain of it. But first she wanted to give him a loving, stable home. She wanted him to learn the value of hard work, and to know what it felt like to covet something and not be able to afford it.

She exhaled softly, steeling her resolve. "He's still a boy," she hedged. "Thank God. I'm not ready to parent a teenager."

"His name?"

"Michael."

Miguel's arms crossed. "Is Michael's father active in his life? Is he active in yours?"

"No. We went our separate ways some time ago."

"Then I don't see a problem." His eyes were dark and brilliant as he stared at her. "He's your son, Faith. I'll take you both."

* * * * *

CHAPTER 4

Faith was glad to be sitting because her knees went weak. "My god..."

Approaching the table, Miguel sat and dug into the food she'd plated for him. His gaze was determined and challenging. So like him. Romance was in his blood. At heart, he believed love conquered all.

She was breathless with the need to cry. He was a warrior prince, set upon a quest to save his fair princess from a life of toil. He wanted to spirit her away to his tower, where he would drape her in jewels and see that her every whim was met.

If only she wanted to be rescued.

Miguel wiped his mouth with a napkin, then drank from one of the bottles of water that had been artfully arranged in the center of the table. Pushing away from her place setting, Faith stood and went to him. He slid his chair back, making room for her.

Lifting her skirt, she straddled him, cupping his face in her hands and trusting him to support her back with his tender grip. Her fingers brushed his hair from his forehead. His eyes closed as if her touch soothed him, but she knew it invariably caused him pain.

"You're so angry," she whispered, brushing her lips over his brow, dying inside because she wished she could always be there to comfort him. She wanted that so much, she couldn't help but doubt her refusal to try... To take the risk...

"I was," he agreed, pulling her closer. "For a moment, I regretted ever meeting you. It pissed me off to think that way. The years we were together were the happiest of my life. I would never change them."

"And I've been so scared that you *would* regret it. That there was no way to avoid us falling apart."

His fingers kneaded into her hips. "I thought you grew out of being insecure about us."

"I did. The comment about the supermodel... it wasn't to say I was forgettable, just that first loves fade for most people." She wrinkled her nose at his arched brow. "Well, they do. But really, I wasn't worried about you being the problem. I was worried about me. I was worried that I'd screw it all up by being miserable."

Miguel's head tilted to the side, his gaze narrowing. "As if I would ever allow you to be."

She smiled at his arrogant assumption that nothing could go wrong if he said it couldn't. Placing her hand over his heart, she felt its strong and steady beat against her palm. A heart that beat for her alone, just as hers had been in his keeping for more than half her life. "Do you know why I work at the shop?"

"It supports your entire family and you're damned good at fixing cars."

"Yes, thank God, because I don't know how to do anything else. I'm lucky that I enjoy it. I go to work every day knowing that my brothers are going to make me laugh, my mom is going to bring something delicious in for lunch, and I'll get to fuss over my dad. I honestly have no idea what I'd do with myself if I didn't work, and I couldn't see how it would be possible for me to do so while you're making multimillion dollar deals. I'm not sure I'd even enjoy wrenching if my family wasn't around while I did it. And part of the magic might be that I work on the cars of people I know and grew up around. I don't know. I just knew that imagining working in a cramped shop off a busy New York street with a bunch of guys I don't know and cars belonging to people I might not see again... it made me unhappy just thinking about it."

His hand began to stroke up and down her back, gentling her, which made her realize she was trembling. "I'm listening."

Faith pressed a kiss to his firm mouth. "I hate to think that I'm one of those people who detest change. I do want to travel and explore. But I want to work, too. I just couldn't see how I could be happy long-term trying to be the kind of partner a man of your stature needs. And my unhappiness would make you unhappy. It really came down to logistics: you couldn't stay and I couldn't go with you. But I knew you'd try to make it work, at great sacrifice to yourself. I was worried you might decide to stay here, for me, when I knew your heart was with joining your father. I *wanted* you to go to Princeton. I *wanted* you to do the things you always talked about doing. But most of all, I didn't want us to make each other miserable. I would rather have us end with one bad memory between us, than with years' worth of them."

"We could have compromised."

"How?" she challenged. "Like Persephone and Hades? Six months in New York and six months here?"

"Not a bad idea," he said evenly.

"You see why I knew we couldn't talk about this?"

"We're going to talk about it." He stood, lifting her as if she weighed nothing. He moved to the couch and settled with her still straddling him. "We're going to make this work."

Her eyes stung. Everything was different now. Her family was financially stable; Miguel had proven to be as lovesick as she'd been all these years. Anything should have been possible. But it wasn't. Because she'd kept a secret from him for too long, and now, no matter when she told him, it was too late. The damage was done.

"Miguel—"

He caught her face in his hands, holding her gaze to his. "I need you, Faith. I'm miserable without you. If you'll work with me on this, bend a little, we can do this. Summer school breaks in New York, the rest of the year here. I can commute twice a week. Fly out Sunday and come back Thursday night. We'll start out slow, give me some time to become a fixture in your life, let Michael get to know me and see how much I love you. How much I'll love him."

Oh God. Her heart was breaking, crumbling into shattered pieces with every word he spoke. "There are things we have to talk about. Things I have to tell you."

He searched her face, his thumbs rubbing softly along her jaw. "Can we discuss it tomorrow? It's going to be my birthday in thirty minutes and I want to be inside you when midnight rolls around."

"It's not right for me to go to bed with you when this is between us." Her heart was pounding, her palms damp. "I'd be taking advantage of you."

"Please do." He brazenly stroked his cock through his pajama bottoms. "The morning is only hours away. Soon enough to clear the air."

He was giving her a reprieve she shouldn't take. "This is important."

"So tell me." Untying the drawstring of his pants, he lifted his hips—and her—to tug them down.

"I'm not going to discuss this while you rock out with your cock out."

Catching her wrist, Miguel pulled her hand down and wrapped her fingers around him. "I can't think when I'm this hard anyway."

He felt like warm marble in her grasp. She gave a tentative stroke and he groaned, tendons cording his neck. Her lips were suddenly dry and she licked them.

Sliding of the couch, she kneeled between his legs and lowered her head.

* * *

Miguel watched with heavy-lidded eyes as Faith's tongue darted out and licked the tip of his dick. She made a soft noise of pleasure and reached between his legs to cup his balls. His head fell back into the sofa cushion, his breath heaving in and out. The sight of her between his legs always drove him insane. Seeing those lush pink lips stretch around the thick head, watching her eyes grow dark with desire. As good as it felt, it was the knowledge that she loved pleasing him this way that made it so

damn hot. She got off on his hunger for her, got off on knowing that he was absolutely defenseless when she had her hands on him.

Tilting her head, she ran her tongue down the pulsing length of his cock, following the line of a thick vein. His hands fisted by his thighs. She swirled her tongue around the head, then fluttered the tip just beneath the crown.

"Fuck. Faith, your mouth..."

She gave him her mouth, parting her lips to take the top few inches into her.

His back arched with a serrated groan. The drenching heat around the most sensitive part of him nearly drove him out of his mind. Her gentle fingertips massaging his balls just about rolled his eyes into the back of his head.

"God, that's good," he gasped, his thighs trembling. "Yes, *mi amor*. Suck my dick. Ah... yes, hard and deep..."

Her hot little mouth drew on him with rapid rhythmic fervor. Her cheeks hollowed on every pull, her head lifting and falling in counter-tempo to her fist pumping at the base. The pleasure was vicious, tightening around his spine and pooling at his lower back. The erotic sounds filling the room—her low moans of pleasure, the wet suckling, his helpless curses as he felt the orgasm barreling through him.

"No more," he growled, fisting her hair and lifting her head from his lap.

Her hands tightened on his cock and balls. "Miguel—"

"No." He caught her wrists and urged her up. "In your pussy, *mi hermosa*. Deep inside you."

Pulling her onto the couch, he pressed her back, sliding his hands up her silken thighs and beneath her skirt. She was hot and wet for him, just from sucking his cock. He parted her with his fingers, rubbing her clit with easy gentle circles. She gasped and arched into his touch.

With his mouth watering for her, he slid down and draped one of her legs over his shoulder; the other rested on the floor, opening her wide. She lay there, breathless beneath him, her pretty pink folds glistening with her desire. Her clit was hard and peeping out from its hood, silently begging for attention.

"Mine," he whispered. "All mine."

Surrounding the tender knot with his lips, Miguel worked it with the tip of his stiffened tongue, fluttering over it until she cried out and bucked into his kiss, coming hard and with such wild abandon he almost lost it.

He pulled himself over her, keeping one of her lithe legs high against his chest. He plunged into her, growling at the feel of her climaxing around his aching cock. Gripping the couch arm for leverage, he powered into her, his orgasm catching the tail of hers and ripping through him. He was rocked by the force of it, his body shuddering so brutally he feared hurting Faith. He clutched her to him, holding her still, his eyes stinging as she held him just as tightly.

"I love you," she sobbed, her short nails digging into his back, where they belonged.

Where he intended to make sure they would always be from this night forward.

* * *

Miguel woke to the sound of the Corvette's purring engine. Stretching, he opened his eyes and looked at the place beside him where Faith should have been. She'd left a note written on the bed and breakfast's letterhead, telling him she'd be back in a couple hours, which would still give them time to talk before they had lunch with Michael.

Michael. The English version of his name. Faith would have known that when she picked it. He took some comfort in that small tie, what precious little he could glean from a situation that evidenced another man's touch on her, a man who shared something profound—*a child*—with her.

Tossing back the covers, he climbed out of bed. He had a lot to do before Faith returned. He needed to extend his time off and make sure the bungalow was open for the next couple of weeks. He needed to talk with his father about a work week in which he teleconferenced as necessary on Thursdays and Fridays. He'd need to purchase a car for his use in California and talk to his mother about his altered circumstances.

In the end, after his shower, he headed to his mother's first. He knew if he stayed away too much longer, she'd come looking for him, and the last thing he wanted was to be interrupted while enjoying Faith. He also wanted to talk with her about some of the things Faith had said. Meredith Santos had left her husband, whom she claimed to still love, to return to her hometown and raise her son. Miguel had been too hurt by the break-up as a kid to ask about it and later on it had seemed like none of his business, but now he saw parallels to Faith's concerns. Any insight he could gain in understanding where Faith was coming from was very much worth it to him to explore. He knew what it was like to lose her; he didn't want to live through that again.

But when he turned onto the street where his mother's very out-of-place mansion was located, it was just in time to see her pulling out in her silver Bentley.

"Guess I'll catch up with you later," he murmured, deciding to head to the shop instead and reacquaint himself with Faith's family. They were going to be his in-laws soon and the quicker everyone got on board with that plan, the better.

He followed his mother out of the residential neighborhoods and into town, just because they were heading in the same direction. As she turned into the parking lot of a drugstore, he slowed behind her by necessity, long enough that the classic Corvette in the parking lot caught his eye, as did the curvaceous woman beside it. Faith had changed into tight, low-slung jeans that showed off her magnificent ass and a black tank top that hugged her full breasts. He crawled by at a snail's pace, staring like the lust and love-crazed fool that he was. When she lifted her hand and waved, he thought for a second it might be at him. Then he realized that it was his mother she greeted.

Pulling into the next driveway, Miguel parked his rental in the first available spot and got out, seeing this as a perfect opportunity to reintroduce the two women in his life—the two Mrs. Santos. It was also a chance to make sure Faith wasn't at the store buying condoms. Yes, he was moving fast; he always had. But they had a lot of years to catch up on.

He was striding toward Faith when he spotted a lanky, dark-haired boy crossing the parking lot to her. She greeted him with open arms, while smiling at his mother, who brought up the rear.

Miguel drew to an abrupt halt, his heartbeat thundering. The boy looked to be a teenager, but couldn't be. He also looked too much like Miguel had at that age. Spitting image.

Staring through unblinking, watering eyes, he watched as his mother rested her hand on the boy's head while talking with Faith. Even with the mounting evidence, it wasn't until the boy happened to glance at him that it all became crystal clear.

Michael straightened, his direct gaze piercing right through Miguel. Frowning, the young boy took a jerky step forward. "Dad?"

* * * * *

CHAPTER 5

"Miguel—"

He turned to his mother with eyes narrowed. "How long have you known?"

Meredith poured a cup of coffee and looked out the window over her kitchen sink. "Since two weeks before you left for Princeton."

Fury seized his chest, thankfully cutting off his ability to say the vicious things that were on the tip of his tongue.

"Uh oh," she said, turning to face him. "It's never good when you become speechless."

"What the fuck do you expect me to say?!" He ran a hand through his hair, his pacing across the travertine floor growing more frenzied. "Christ. I had a right to know."

"And she intended to tell you." His mother watched him move with her cat-like green eyes. She was still stunningly beautiful; her face still very much like it had been when she'd been a popular prime time television star. "As soon as you graduated."

"Why wait?"

"She was so afraid she was going to ruin your life."

"And you didn't absolve her of that bullshit notion."

"It wasn't bullshit. She was a young girl, still in high school. She wasn't going to be able to go with you. At that time in her life, she needed stability and her mother. You wouldn't have left her, not like that. And even if we'd convinced you to go ahead for a year, you would have insisted she join you after the baby was born, which would have taken her away from her support system and jeopardized your studies."

He glared at her.

"Too reasoned for you?" She waved one hand, so damn confident she'd done the right thing abetting Faith in keeping their child a secret. "I'll be honest: when she first came to me, I thanked God for allowing you to dodge that train wreck. She had you by the balls with Michael. He was going to be a direct siphon into your bank account."

"You were always wrong about her," he bit out. "I told you that."

"I couldn't take your word for it. You were young, in love, and salivating with lust. It will sound clichéd, but I thought she had you in a sexual spell."

Spotting a framed photo on a shelf, Miguel went to it and picked it up. It was Michael as a toddler, beating two dandelions together in the garden and laughing. "Was this taken around the time I graduated?"

"Yes."

"And still no one told me."

"That's your fault."

He looked at her over his shoulder. "Excuse me?"

"There wasn't a single time you called or wrote where you didn't extol the virtues of your latest girlfriend. It seemed clear that you'd moved on. Faith was terrified you'd take her son—"

"*Our* son."

"Michael," she corrected. "She was afraid you'd set up a homestead in New York with your society wife and she'd lose both you and your son."

"And you didn't absolve her of that notion either!"

"Why weren't you honest in your correspondence?" she shot back, leaning into the counter. Even though she was unlikely to leave the house again, she was wearing a silk blouse, pencil skirt, heels, and a sapphire choker. "I'm your mother. You could have told me the truth."

He barked out a laugh. "While you were lying to me? While you were so heroically saving me from a gold digger, I was supposed to tell you I was wretched without her? That there were nights when I couldn't breathe for missing her?"

"Instead you deliberately fed me what you wanted her to hear, didn't you?" Her voice and eyes were soft with compassion. "You wanted her to think that you'd already forgotten about her and found someone better, which made you adversaries for Michael. Pride did you both in."

The truth hurt as much as the lies. "Does Dad know about Michael?"

"No. But Michael knows about you. He has a biased view, of course. Faith doesn't see any of your faults. Well... that's not true. She does see them, but she loves you for them."

God... how had they managed to fuck up perfection? What they had together...

They had a son. Together. The family he'd always wanted with her.

"I have to go." He headed toward the archway that divided the kitchen from the living room.

"Go easy on her!" she shouted after him.

"I'm not done with you," he shouted back, slamming the front door closed behind him.

* * *

He found her on the beach.

Faith had known he would, when he was ready. They'd come here often in high school. With a blanket and boundless passion, they'd made love here more times than she could count. She'd like to think that love still lingered here, in memory, and that they could hold on to it and weather the storm. But that was a small hope amid big issues. There was so much between them now, so much she'd put between them. How could he ever look past it all? She knew how she would feel if she'd lost ten years of Michael's life.

She felt him approach without turning around. Miguel Santos was like a force of nature. In business or the bedroom, he swept through like a tornado, so exhilarating and dangerous. She waited with her bare feet dug into the cool sand and her arms clasped around her upraised knees. Wind whipped through her hair, drying her tears nearly as fast as they fell.

He sat down beside her. "Where's Michael?"

"At the shop. I didn't want him to see me like this." She blew out a shaky breath. "I don't want *you* to see me like this. I have no right to cry."

His hands curled into fists in the sand.

"I'm sorry," she said softly, her gut knotting at how cold and hard-faced he looked. She'd prayed never to see that look of betrayal on his face again. Something inside her died at the sight of it.

"We are so perfect together." He stared at the horizon. "And yet we fucked this up."

"I know." More tears fell and she brushed them impatiently away. The waves crashed against the shore in rhythmic roars. Seagulls screeched overhead, their wings

stretched to ride the powerful ocean breeze. She would forever associate those sounds with Miguel and the pure, untarnished love he'd once had for her.

"We're going to have to do better when we're married."

Her gaze jerked back to him.

"Don't look so shocked," he muttered. "We know what we've got, what we're willing to do for it. We just have to stop making decisions for each other without talking about things first."

Her mouth curved with self-derision. "You say 'we,' but it's really me."

"Not true." He reached over and took her hand. "I never asked you what you wanted. I just assumed you wanted the same things I did."

Her fingers linked with his. "We've got so much shit to wade through. How do we get to the other side of this?"

"We need counseling, and we'll get it. We'll have to work on us for a while. Figure out how to compromise, discuss possibilities, get rid of resentments, and move forward as one unit. Piece of cake."

She laughed, but more tears fell. Turning, she pushed him back into the sand and straddled him. "So we forgive and we heal, and we learn to compromise and live happily ever after?"

Propping himself up on his elbows, he stared up her. "Yes, *mi amor*. Is that so hard to believe? I can bend and you can trust. We can do this. We love each other to the point where we're driven to do crazy things. If we put as much effort into staying together as we put into staying apart, we'll be in great shape."

"You're so certain you can make everything work out the way you want, aren't you?" She was amazed love and hope could mingle so easily with pain and regret.

He lifted one shoulder in an insolent shrug. "You love that about me."

Faith set her hands over his heart to feel its beat. "I do," she agreed softly. "You lead the way, I promise to follow this time."

"Not follow. We do this together." He set one warm hand over hers. "Side-by-side, each giving a little ground so we can meet in the middle."

Nodding, she said hoarsely, "I can do that."

"This might be my best birthday ever."

"It'll only get better." She bent down to press her lips to his. "I promise you that."

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About the Author

SYLVIA DAY

Sylvia Day is the national bestselling, award-winning author of a dozen novels written across multiple sub-genres, under multiple pen names—*three!* A wife and mother of two, she is a former Russian linguist for the U.S. Army Military Intelligence. Sylvia's work has been called "wonderful and passionate" by WNBC.com and "wickedly entertaining" by *Booklist*. Her stories have been translated into Russian, Japanese, Portuguese, German, Czech, and Thai. She's been honored with the *Romantic Times* Reviewers' Choice Award, the EPPIE award, the National Readers' Choice Award, the Readers' Crown, and multiple finalist nominations for Romance Writers of America's prestigious RITA Award of Excellence.

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CHAPTER 1

When Jack Killigrew's phone rang, it usually meant someone's life was on the line. Since he was on leave from the Marshals Service office in Albuquerque, the only calls he would be receiving were in his capacity as a Special Operations Group deputy. As such, he was a last resort and on call twenty-four hours a day. His twelve-man response team was activated only after the shit had already hit the fan.

There were a lot of emotions that filtered through Jack when he was called in, but relief wasn't usually one them. Right now, however, he'd give just about anything for an excuse to head in the opposite direction.

His fellow deputies would laugh if they knew how edgy he was getting with every mile that passed. As a SOG deputy marshal—a Shadow Stalker—he squared off with hardened criminals and suicidal terrorists as a matter of course. He hunted and apprehended the country's most-wanted fugitives. He did his job with mechanical precision, never breaking a sweat. The guys called him "Iron Jack," the man who'd do anything. He faced death as if he had nothing to lose or nothing to live for.

Yet the thought of facing Rachel Tse was shredding him.

"Killigrew," he answered via the hands-free Bluetooth control in his steering wheel. He'd already noted the lack of a shoulder on the two-lane road. With agricultural fields on each side of him, turning his long Chevy Silverado around wouldn't be easy.

"Jack."

Christ. The voice on the other end of the line reverberated through him like a gunshot report.

"Rachel," he replied gruffly, slowly recovering from the husky sound of her voice. "Everything all right?"

"Yes." She said the word breathlessly, which made him hard. "I was wondering if you'd be here in time for lunch."

"Lunch?" God, he was screwed. His best friend's widow was winded from pulling together a birthday party for his eight-year-old godson and he was getting a boner.

It had been two years since he'd last seen her, but apparently time didn't matter. He'd put off this reunion as long as he could, but the time had come to deal with it. Steve's last request had eaten into him far enough to become hazardous. Jack couldn't allow his own personal crap to jeopardize his team any more than it already had.

"Jack? Did I lose you?"

"I'm here. I was just calculating the possibility of my arriving in time for lunch. I don't think it's going to happen."

There was a pause, as if she sensed the lie.

He hated bullshitting her, but he couldn't see her today. He needed time to get his head on straight. He hadn't taken a leave of absence in years and without work to occupy him, he found himself thinking too damn much about her. Visions of her blond hair fisted in his hands... her taut, sweet nipples tightening against his tongue... her long, lithe legs spreading in invitation...

Getting that obsession under control was a necessity if he had any hope of convincing her she was off the hook as far as he was concerned. He was still reeling from Steve's request that he look after her if she was ever left alone. Jack realized his friend must have known how he felt. As careful as he'd been to hide his longing, something must have betrayed him.

And that killed him. No man should have to deal with knowing his best friend is in love with his wife.

"Where are you?" she pressed.

"I haven't reached King City yet." Jack had passed King City long ago and was about twenty minutes away from Monterey. He would pick up the keys to his cottage in Carmel from the property managers who rented it out for him, then grab a six-pack of beer and hunker down for the night. He'd get his bearings and be better capable of facing her in the morning.

"Let's make it dinner, then. Riley's spending the night at a friend's house so I can wrap his gifts without him peeking. It'll be just you and me. We can catch up."

Just her and him. At night. With Riley gone until morning? Yeah, right. Jack could imagine the mess running through Rachel's head now. She'd been crazy about Steve. Madly in love. If she thought Steve wanted them together, she'd make it work, even though he scared the shit out of her. Part of his job was reading people, and as focused on her as his instincts were, there wasn't a damn thing about her he didn't register. When he walked into the room, she became skittish—nostrils flaring, eyes widening, body moving restlessly. Her primal reaction aroused every predatory sense in his body, making him edgy and sharpening his hunger for her.

"How about I take you two out to breakfast in the morning?" His voice was rough with desire. "Then I'll help you finish setting up for his party."

"All right. But if you make it into town sooner, call me. And be careful on the road."

It wasn't a casual warning for Rachel. Steve had been killed by a drunk driver on the way home from work one night, changing all of their lives forever.

Jack hung up. Shifting on the seat, he adjusted the fit of his jeans, which was now extremely uncomfortable. Ahead of him, the road to perdition wound its way through the tiny town of Spreckles.

It was going to be a long week.

###

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